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The Orient in Württemberg

The Topographies of Hermann von Sachsenheim

Abstract: *This article discusses the construction of literal and allegorical topographies in Hermann von Sachsenheim's ›Die Mörin‹ and ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹, focusing particularly on the apparent opposition between Swabia and the otherworlds to which the narrator in both texts finds himself transported. This opposition is particularly complex in ›Die Mörin‹, in which the land of the personification Venus-Minne is geographically remote and exotic, but at the same time intimately, and provocatively, connected with South-Western Germany; and in which Venus-Minne herself is not only a conventional allegorical figure, but also an aggressive heathen despot who lays political claim to a number of German cities. The article also foregrounds questions of intertextuality, of gender, and of ›occidental‹ versus ›oriental‹ perspective in character dialogues, before suggesting that in both texts, Mechthild von der Pfalz, the patron of Hermann von Sachsenheim, is aligned with the Wolfram-inspired personification fraw Abentur.*

The topographies created by Hermann von Sachsenheim in ›Die Mörin‹ (1453) challenge the conventional binary opposition, not only between literal and allegorical space, but also between Germany and the Orient.[1] In this text, the land of the per-

1 Hermann von Sachsenheim, Die Mörin. Nach der Wiener Handschrift ÖNB 2946, ed. with a commentary by Horst Dieter Schlosser, Wiesbaden 1974 (Deutsche Klassiker des Mittelalters, N. F. 3). Cf. esp. Peter Strohschneider, Ritterromantische Versepik im ausgehenden Mittelalter. Studien zu einer funktionsgeschichtlichen Textinterpretation der ›Mörin‹ Hermanns von Sachsenheim sowie zu Ulrich Fueterers ›Persibein‹ und Maximilians I. ›Teuerdank‹, Frankfurt a. M. 1986 (Mikrokosmos. Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft und Bedeutungsforschung 14); Ralf Schlechtweg-Jahn, Erzählen im Umbruch: Dialogisierung und Autorfunktion in der ›Mörin‹ Hermanns von Sachsenheim, Fifteenth Century Studies 26 (2001), pp. 142–157; Id., Die Zersetzung der Performanzen des juristischen Diskurses in Hermanns von Sachsenheim ›Die Mörin‹, in: Mediävistik und Kulturwissenschaften. Mediävistik und Neue Philologie. Akten des X. Internationalen Germanistenkongresses Wien 2000: Zeitenwende – Die Germanistik auf dem Weg vom 20. ins 21. Jahrhundert, ed. by Peter Wiesinger, Bern 2002 (Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik: Reihe A, Kongressberichte 57), pp. 347–354; Burghart Wachinger, Gespräche in der ›Mörin‹ Hermanns von Sachsenheim, in: Literatur und Wandmalerei II: Konventionalität und Konversation, ed. by Eckart Conrad Lutz [et al.], Tübingen 2005, pp. 139–154; Dietrich Huschenbett, Hermann von Sachsenheim – Namen und Begriffe: Kommentar zum Verzeichnis aller Namen und ausgewählter Begriffe im Gesamtwerk, Würzburg 2007 (Würzburger Beiträge zur Deutschen Philologie 32); Stefanie Helmschrott, West-östliche Dialoge in der Mörin Hermanns von Sachsenheim (1453), in: East Meets West in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times:

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sonification Venus-Minne is geographically remote and exotic, but at the same time intimately, and provocatively, connected with South-Western Germany. The central conceit of the work is a piece of deliberate hermeneutic blurring: Venus-Minne is construed as not only an allegorical figure with universal control over human sexual desire, but also as a heathen despot with far-reaching political and territorial claims. The episcopal cities of Cologne, Basel, Aachen and Konstanz are supposedly already under her control, whilst her proceedings against the narrator draw attention, not only to Swabian identity in the broadest sense, but also to specific localities within both parts of Württemberg (Urach and Stuttgart).[2] As Dietrich Huschenbett puts it, »Der ›Jurist‹ Hermann von Sachsenheim macht sich in seinem Prozeß-Roman, ›Die Mörin‹, den Spaß, Minne als juristisches Problem vorzustellen.«[3] The legal problem to which Huschenbett refers is quite different from the kind of disputes normally featured within *Minnekasuistik*: instead of probing questions regarding right- or wrongful behaviour on the part of lovers, this text probes the intersection of allegory, law and politics, questioning the formal jurisdiction of Venus-Minne over the narrator, a free-born Swabian. On another level, the numerous intertextual references in the text, combined with the celebration of Mechthild von der Pfalz, the author's patron, also serve to foreground the importance of this region within the literary and cultural landscape of Germany.[4]

›Die Mörin‹ poses numerous interpretational challenges and defies easy classification. It is often described as a *Minnerede*, featuring as it does a first-person encounter with Minne personified; however, the length of the text (6080 lines) and its focus on the intersection between allegory, law and politics sets it apart from other representatives of the genre.[5] It might equally well be described as a Menippean sat-

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Transcultural Experiences in the Premodern World, ed. by Albrecht Classen, Berlin 2013, pp. 625–647; Burghart Wachinger, Einige Anmerkungen zur ›Mörin‹ Hermanns von Sachsenheim, PBB 139 (2017), pp. 221–242. For older critical literature, see Dietrich Huschenbett, Hermann von Sachsenheim, in: ^{2}VL, vol. 3, 1981, col. 1092–1106.

2 For the interaction between the parallel courts in Urach and Stuttgart, see Oliver Auge, Kongruenz und Konkurrenz: Württembergs Residenzen im Spätmittelalter, in: Der württembergische Hof im 15. Jahrhundert, ed. by Peter Rückert, Stuttgart 2006, pp. 53–74; for a broader historical overview, see Sönke Lorenz, Die Herrschaft Württemberg im Mittelalter: Von der Stammburg zur Residenzstadt, in the same volume, pp. 9–51.

3 Dietrich Huschenbett, Eine Mörin-Quelle. Die Minnelehre des Johann von Konstanz als Vorlage zur Mörin Hermanns von Sachsenheim, in: *Vir ingenio mirandus*. Studies presented to John L. Flood, ed. by William Jervis Jones [et al.], Göppingen 2003 (GAG 710), vol. 1, pp. 227–241, here 227.

4 Cf. Bernhard Theil, Literatur und Literaten am Hof der Erzherzogin Mechthild in Rottenburg, Zeitschrift für Württembergische Landesgeschichte 42 (1983), pp. 125–144; Renate Kruska, Mechthild von der Pfalz. Im Spannungsfeld von Geschichte und Literatur, Frankfurt a. M. 1989 (Europäische Hochschulschriften 1111); Hans-Martin Maurer, Eberhard und Mechthild. Untersuchungen zu Politik und Kultur im ausgehenden Mittelalter, Stuttgart 1994 (Lebendige Vergangenheit 17).

5 For discussion of the challenges involved in accommodating ›Die Mörin‹ within the genre of the *Minnerede*, see Horst Dieter Schlosser, Das politische Ende der Minnerede in der Mörin Hermanns

ire on a par with Alan of Lille's ›De planctu naturae‹ or even Lewis Carroll's ›Alice in Wonderland‹ – in the sense that its humour is predominantly intellectual, using the device of the otherworld as a means of »holding up contemporary life to gentle ridicule«.[6] Writing with reference to Menippean Satires of the Renaissance, Scott Blanschard notes:

Menippean satire is a genre both for and about scholars; it is an immensely learned form that is at the same time paradoxically anti-intellectual. If the master of ceremonies is the humanist as wise fool, its audience is a learned community whose members need to be reminded, with Paul, of the depravity of their overarching intellects, of the limits of human understanding.[7]

Whilst one might not wish to apply the term ›humanist‹ to Hermann von Sachsenheim or to his narrative persona, this description matches the tone and contents of the text, not least with respect to the wry self-deprecation of the narrator.

›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹, a shorter and more conventional *Minnerede* written by Hermann von Sachsenheim around the same time as ›Die Mörin‹, provides a useful foil for probing the more radical approach adopted in the latter text, not only in the construction of literal and allegorical space, which will be the main topic of this article, but also with regard to consequent issues of gender, identity and religious difference.[8] On the face of it, these two texts form a natural pair. The storylines follow parallel trajectories, describing the way in which the Swabian narrator – an elderly, rather lecherous knight – is transported into an otherworld where he has to deal with the wrath of various frightening, powerful female figures.[9] Both texts are laden with intertextual references, especially to Wolfram von Eschenbach; both celebrate the cosmic power of fraw Abentür alongside that of Mechthild von der Pfalz. However, the two works also differ significantly, notably with regard to the question of the narrator's guilt, and to the complexity of the otherworld itself.

In both narratives, the journey of the narrator falls in two parts: an introspective walk in the woods leads to an encounter with otherworldly representatives, who

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von Sachsenheim, in: *Ûf der maze pfât*: Festschrift für Werner Hoffmann zum 60. Geburtstag, ed. by Waltraud Fritsch-Rößler, Göppingen 1991 (GAG 555), pp. 291–308; Jacob Klingner, Minnereden im Druck: Studien zur Gattungsgeschichte im Zeitalter des Medienwechsels, Berlin 2010 (Philologische Studien und Quellen 226), pp. 238 f.

6 Chris Baldrick, Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, Oxford [3]2008, pp. 202 f., here 203; for a medieval perspective, see also F. Anne Payne, Chaucer and Menippean Satire, Madison. Wisconsin/London 1981; in particular, Payne highlights the way in which this genre often goes unrecognized (p. 3).

7 W. Scott Blanchard, Scholar's Bedlam. Menippean Satire in the Renaissance, London/Toronto 1995, p. 14. See also Howard D. Weinbrot, Menippean Satire Reconsidered. From Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century, Baltimore 2005.

8 Hermann von Sachsenheim, Des Spiegels Abenteuer, ed. by Thomas Kerth, Göppingen 1986 (GAG 451).

9 For the combination of terror and comedy in ›Die Mörin‹ (with particular reference to Brunhilt), see Dieter Welz, Witz, Komik und Humor in der ›Mörin‹ des Hermann von Sachsenheim, ZfdA 109 (1980), pp. 337–361.

then use magical means to transport him into a very different space.[10] ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹ devotes considerable attention to the time spent in the liminal woods. Impelled by *verlangen* (SA 25), the narrator wanders through an idyllic landscape which, although apparently still part of Swabia, already has some otherworldly qualities.[11] In this *locus amoenus*, he encounters a weeping woman, who identifies herself as fraw Druw (SA 409). She is one of twelve sisters, each of whom has been sent out into the world to raise tribute for their ruler, the Empress fraw Abentür; however, fraw Druw has drawn the short straw in having been sent to Swabia. This humorous topographical anchoring of the encounter is somewhat at odds with the suggestion that the narrator has already moved into a non-literal space – a tension that is compounded by the rather negative image of Swabians that emerges from the narrator's conversation with the personification. He tries to explain that her mission is bound to fail, since the Swabians are too poor and/or miserly to pay tribute to anybody (SA 389–395). The lady explains that she is looking for moral rather than financial commitment; but that, after spending a whole year in Swabia, she has failed to find a single faithful lover. In the course of her lament, a rather different impression of the Swabian topography emerges: although the narrator initially presented the lady as sitting by *einen schonen brunnen* (SA 89), shaded and surrounded by *blůmchen* (SA 93), she now describes herself as having struggled *in disen walt so wilden* (SA 579) and *in diser wůstin* (SA 582). Swabia thus appears as a wasteland – morally, if not literally. The narrator proposes that the lady should come back to his home (SA 597: *mit mir zu mynem huß*) – an invitation which may be read as an attempt to seduce her, and hence as confirming her assessment of local *mores*. When she declines, he suggests, rather rashly, that he should instead accompany her on her journey back home, in order to prove to fraw Abentür that there is in fact such a thing as a faithful Swabian. Fraw Druw is justifiably suspicious (SA 787: *ich forcht, ich sy an dir bedrogen*), but relents after he declares his willingness to be put to death (SA 793: *erdrencken*), should he in any way falter in his loyalty to his beloved. A dwarf has conveniently arrived in a magical ship to take the personification home, and the narrator joins them. During the journey, however, he immediately disgraces himself: against the advice of fraw Druw, he glances into a magical mirror, catches sight of an unknown beauty, and forgets all about his beloved who is waiting for him at home.

10 For the uses of magic in the text, see Sarah Westpfahl, Magic in *Die Mörin* by Hermann von Sachsenheim, Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik, Themenheft Zauber und Magie, ed. by Wolfgang Haubrichs, 130 (2003), pp. 72–87.

11 The metaphors used in the short prologue have already primed the audience for this kind of trajectory, with the author/narrator suggesting an intellectual ascent into a separate realm: *myn synn höh uff stigen* / *in kunstrichen sal* (SA 2–3). By opening the metaphorical gates, he also allows the audience to participate: *je doch wil ich die port* / *entschliessen myner synn* (SA 16 f.).

In ›Die Mörin‹, by contrast, the time spent in the liminal space of the woods is less important: the narrator's introspective wanderings (M 10: *Do ward ich mitt mir selb zů rǎt*) are immediately interrupted by an act of extraordinary rendition: two men overpower him, tie him up, and transport him into the land of Venus-Minne. Here he is to stand trial for allegedly having reneged on his sworn allegiance to her. Although this narrator is not so foolish as to have volunteered for the journey himself, he is nonetheless pleased when he first learns of the destination (M 135–138; 142 f.), thereby proving himself to be as naively optimistic as his counterpart in ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹. Of course, his expectations of pleasant erotic experiences are promptly dashed. The land does have some paradisical qualities (M 177–179), and many of its inhabitants are courteous and civilized. Nonetheless, the regime is deeply dysfunctional and the protagonist risks losing his life as a result of the irrational antagonism of Venus-Minne herself and of her chief advisor, the eponymous *mörin* Brunhilt.

In ›Des Spiegel Abenteuer‹, the opposition between literal and allegorical space is more clearly delineated. The second part of the journey, i. e. from the Swabian woods to the land of fraw Abentur, represents a clear transition into allegorical space. In the course of this journey, the narrator makes passing reference to a number of remote and exotic places. For example, to evade the wrath of Fraw Druw, he wishes he were in Novgorod with the Russians (SA 1206–1209), and presents himself hypothetically as a Tartar: *ich moht uch des wol erbarmen, / und wer ich ein wilder Datter*. (SA 1266 f.). Although his references to Russia and Tartary serve to create a sense of distance travelled, there is no suggestion that the magical ship actually goes anywhere near these literal places. Similarly, once the destination is reached, the Orient functions merely as a comparator: the narrator reports he saw more jewels and pearls than one could expect to find *ze Kockesas* (SA 1402) or *zu orient* (SA 1405), and that their boat enjoyed a more splendid reception than was ever accorded to the Caliph *zu Mecka, da det hangen / in swebender wiß Machmet*. (SA 1422 f.)

On the return journey, there are more overt references to literal landmarks: riding on the back of a griffin in the company of a dwarf, the narrator believes that he can spot, first Mount Etna on Sicily, and then the Etzel, a mountain near Zurich. On the basis of this, Thomas Kerth suggests that the land of fraw Abentür is located »auf dem afrikanischen Festland«.[12] However, it should be noted that the narrator's supposed sightings are never confirmed by the dwarf; despite the former's excited question as to whether they really are flying over Etna, (SA 2568: *her zwerg, bescheident mich* [...]; SA 2574 f.: *ist es im land Cecilgen, / dar inn ein berg brint?*), the dwarf remains non-committal and counters these questions with questions of his own. However, even if one accepts KERTH's suggestion that the griffin must be flying due north in order to take the narrator home, there is no real sense that the land of fraw

12 Kerth [n. 8], p. 224.

Abentur fits into normal geopolitical parameters: it is essentially an inner space, the culmination of an introspective journey which brings the narrator face to face with the personified forces and values who have shaped his life.

The fact that fraw Abentur recognises, and disparages, the narrator immediately upon his arrival adds to the sense that this is no ordinary foreign country:

sag an, was schafft du hie?
ich ken dich ye und ye,
das du bist ungedruw. (SA 1527–1529)

The irreality – or interiority – of this space is further underscored by the fact that it is populated almost exclusively by allegorical female figures: whilst there are passing references to male office-holders (e. g. SA 2352: *der schriber*), the narrator has no interaction with male figures other than the dwarf.

In ›Die Mörin‹, by contrast, the land of Venus-Minne seems to be located within the literal Orient.[13] Here, Brunhilt is accompanied by real Tartars as she rides around on her unicorn (M 704–709),[14] and rather than just thinking about Russians, the narrator sees men actually dressed in the style of Novgorod (M 675). He confidently identifies specific Oriental languages:

Da hort ich gar ain groß geschray
Von vil der zungen mangerlay,
Kaldayscher und von Indyon. (M 443–445)
and locations:
Ich hort ouch mangen wilden don
Uß fremden inseln hie und da,
Besonder von der ferren India,
Da Thomas der zwelffbotte lit,
Und anderhalb zů yener syt
Das groß gebirg von golde rich,
Daruff die griffen steteklich
Den tŏben lüten fügen pin. (M 446– 453)

A later reference to *Antarticus der widerstern* (M 3886) also suggests that this land may be located in the southern hemisphere.

13 In describing this land, the narrator of ›Die Mörin‹ uses the same kind of orientalising comparators that feature in ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹ – for example: *Der solden rich von Babilon* / *Kostlicher baner nie gewan* (M 516 f.).

14 Welz [n. 9] suggests that the unicorn endows Brunhilt with a certain phallic power which contributes to the intimidation of the narrator – not least in the light of his own age-related impotence: *So bin ich laider worden treg.* / *Ich spring nit hoch, wie wol man pfiff* (M 5846 f.). The supposedly masculine aspects of Brunhilt's personality are also highlighted by Tannhäuser: *Der küng der lacht und sach sie an* / *Und sprach: »Brunhilt, werst du ain man,* / *Wer möcht beliben denn vor deir?*« (M 2685–2687). Of course, she is not actually a man and therefore ultimately fails to prevail in the conflict with the narrator.

Although magic is involved in transporting the narrator, his captors and their tent (M 170) at great speed to their destination, the land of Venus-Minne can also be reached by ordinary ship (M 175: *über mer*). Indeed, one of the inhabitants later makes a quip about Swabians not normally being good sailors:

du alter gris,
Was hăt getragen dich zů land?
Nůn ist doch hie das mer mit sand,
Darüber nie kain Swab nie kann. (M 526–529)

However, Swabians are not the only ones to worry about the dangers of travelling by the sea. Another inhabitant of the land of Venus-Minne highlights the practical risks (military rather than magical) that are involved in crossing the Lebermeer (M 3800–3803), and even King Tannhäuser, the consort of Venus-Minne, expresses mundane concern about the naval supremacy of the Turks:

Du waist wol, wie es ummb uns lit,
Sölt wir yetz faren über mer
So gar durch ain grussliches herr,
Als dort der türkisch kayser hăt. (M 5782–5785)

This fear of the Turkish threat may be read as an example of the ›occidental‹ mindset intermittently displayed by many of the inhabitants – a theme which will be discussed further below. However, there also seem to be Turks resident within the land of Venus-Minne, or at least people resembling Turks:

Ain buoch das haisset der Alcron,
Das trůgen in dry priester vor
Mit claider als zum Ysnin tor,
Da sich die Türky vahet an. (M 680–683)

The narrator also makes occasional references to more mundane cultural practices. For example, when he stresses that he and his companions sit together at the table in the German manner (M 5536), this detail suggests to the audience that such arrangements might not be normal Oriental practice. ›Die Mörin‹ thus creates a more complex society populated by men and women, natives and foreigners, human beings and allegorical entities.

The narrative world of ›Die Mörin‹ also recognises the existence of fraw Abentur as the ultimate authority figure, although she does not intervene directly in events and seems to exist in a different kind of space to that of Venus-Minne. Eckhart, the narrator's friend and helper, describes the palace of fraw Abentur as reaching through the clouds into the firmament (M 2730–2735); Venus-Minne acknowledges her as her liege lady (M 5795–5797); Tannhäuser presents her as a quasi-cosmic being: *Frow Aubentür hăt langes hăr, / Dar in so flicht sich als dis welt*. (M 3864–

3865); and the narrator himself affirms the principle that *All sach durch Aubentüre geschicht* (M 3860). These few, but striking, references contribute to the impression that fraw Abentur is a pure personification, existing in an abstract domain whilst simultaneously pervading all earthly life. Venus-Minne, by contrast, is a hybrid figure, and her status as a heathen, terrestrial ruler means that her allegorical involvement in the love-lives of Germans comes across as threatening and imperialist.

The foregrounding of religious difference is crucial for anchoring the land of Venus-Minne in the earthly Orient rather than in an allegorical meta-space. With a few notable exceptions, the inhabitants are all heathens, worshipping a plethora of gods that include Machmet. The noble Eckhart, however, who is traditionally associated with the Tannhäuser legend and with the Venusberg,[15] remains a Christian. The narrator also engages with a number of honourable and fair-minded Saracens who seem genuinely puzzled by Christianity and who want him to convert for his own benefit.[16]

On the basis of these interactions, Stefanie Helmschrott has argued that cross-cultural exchanges in the tradition of Wolfram's ›Willehalm‹ are fundamental to the meaning of the ›Die Mörin‹, composed as it was in 1453, »the year when the fall of Constantinople left an indelible mark on the Western world and had a traumatic impact«.[17] However, whilst some of the religious dialogues seem sincere and serious, Helmschrott's approach is too narrow. Dialogues are certainly important in this work – as Burghart Wachinger states, »*Die Mörin* Hermanns von Sachsenheim lebt von den Gesprächen.«[18] However, religion is just one of many topics to occupy the narrator, Eckhart and their friends. The narrator in particular seems keen to provide anecdotes that relate amusing and fantastical occurrences in Württemberg – for example, when an old woman from Urach rides a calf over a chasm (M 3997–3999), or another old woman applies a magic salve to a calf in order to enable her husband to fly on it to Prague to deliver a message to Charles IV from a count of Württemberg (M 4008–4043).[19] Such anecdotes do not reflect any fundamentally occidental values or world views; they represent a playful and slightly grotesque attempt to exoti-

15 For an overview of the Tannhäuser legend in relation to ›Die Mörin‹, see Huschenbett, Namen [n. 1], pp. 273–274 and 289–292.

16 Well-intentioned knights and ladies urge the narrator to appeal to Machmet for protection against the Venus-Minne (M 770–777); the kindly Marshall encourages prayer to his god, since Jesus is not helping (M 2253–2255); and later the Marshall claims that he has appealed to Machmet on behalf of the narrator and has received assurance that Machmet will be merciful, provided that the narrator converts (M 5346–5358).

17 Helmschrott [n. 1], p. 625.

18 Wachinger, Gespräche [n. 1], p. 151.

19 On the origins of these anecdotes, see Huschenbett, Namen [n. 1], pp. 151 and 286.

cize Württemberg by crediting the region with its own magic, and to show, at the very least, that the Orientals are not the only ones capable of organizing air travel.[20]

In the conversations in ›Die Mörin‹, the real opposition is not so much between Christian and heathen value systems, but rather between genders, with the civilized, respectful and faintly ironic *conversatio hominum*[21] standing in marked contrast, not only to the abusive aggression of the main female characters,[22] but also to the narrator's own inability to relate to women other than through relentless sexual innuendo. His opening address to Brunhilt is a case in point:

»Genedig frow von hoher art,
Sind irs, die edel küngin zart,
Der Salmon pflog, der wyse man?«
Sie lacht und sach mich spottlich an,
Und sprach: »hab danck, min lieber goch!« (M 325–329)

By comparing Brunhilt to the bride from the Song of Songs, the narrator manages simultaneously to reference her blackness and to cast her in a connubial role that is clearly displeasing to her.[23] It is noteworthy that whereas he initially seems to regard her as desirable, his references to the ethnic and cultural status accorded to her become increasingly disparaging as the story progresses: half-way through, she is said to be *swarcz und ungestalt* (M 3415), and by the end, she has been reduced to *das ungetöffte tyer* (M 5763).

Helmschrott's theory that ›Die Mörin‹ is centrally concerned with cross-cultural dialogue is also undermined by the fact that some of the inhabitants operate with a frame of reference that is incongruously and comically Eurocentric – to such an extent that questions of genuine cultural difference sometimes seem as irrelevant in ›Die Mörin‹ as they do in The Mikado.[24] The quip about Swabians being poor sailors shows that the inhabitants of this land have not only heard of Swabia, but also associate certain stereotypes with it. Similarly, the Song of Songs example just quoted

20 For a more detailed analysis of these anecdotes, see Westphal [n. 10], pp. 75–77. She concludes that the tale is »a kind of compliment to the lord of Württemberg« (p. 77).

21 Wachinger, Gespräche [n. 1], p. 152.

22 The text does feature three visiting princesses who, although closely related to Venus-Minne, adopt a more reasonable approach towards the narrator; according to Huschenbett, Namen [n. 1], p. 102: »Im ›Mörin‹-Prozeß übernehmen die drei Fürstinnen die Rolle von kritischen Anwälten auch gegenüber der Königin Venus-Minn.« One of these princesses encourages the narrator to be of good cheer, specifically assuring him of wider female support at the court (M 728–733).

23 For the sexual stereotyping of black women in medieval German literature (and more broadly), see Alfred Ebenbauer, *Es gibt ain mörynne vil dick susse mynne*. Belakanes Landsleute in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, ZfdA 113 (1984), pp. 16–42 (p. 36 for Brunhilt in ›Die Mörin‹).

24 W. S. Gilbert, The Mikado or The Town of Titipu, illustrated by W. Russell Flint and Charles E. Brock, London 1928 (fascimile edn. London 1979).

demonstrates Brunhilt's ability to understand a biblical allusion (and its wider significance within Western bridal mysticism).

For somebody inhabiting an island in the southern seas, Brunhilt seems remarkably focussed on the cultural and topographical specifics of Germany. She taunts the narrator by calling him *ain geck vom Rin* (M 320) and later claims that *Und werst du nit der jar als alt, / Du fürst ǎn růder über Rin.* (M 374 f.). The sense of this accusation is not altogether clear,[25] but in the context of the narrator's general stance of optimistic flirtatiousness, the act of setting out to cross the Rhine without an oar appears to suggest a tendency to act on thoughtless sexual impulse – whilst at the same time reminding the narrator that his advanced age will prevent him from seeing such a venture through to the end.[26]

In a subsequent put-down, Brunhilt once again demonstrates her familiarity with Western stereotypes – in this case, with that of the unchaste religious woman:

> *Wie dunckt er sich so maisterlos!*
> *Er went, er sy in ainer klos*
> *Und red mit ainer klessnerin.* (M 383–385)

Whilst attacking the narrator for being a dirty old man who habitually makes improper advances to enclosed women, Brunhilt also implies that such women might well respond positively. Furthermore, when she later accuses him of having seduced nuns (M 2182–2187), she formulates the charge in a way that demonstrates her understanding of the sacrament of confession and with the full range of connotations of *jubiliern* (M 2182):

> *Dar zů so kund er jubiliern*
> *In mengen clöstern hie und dort* [...]
> *Er hort manig nünlin ǒch zů bicht*
> *Und sprach er es selbs die absolucz* [...] (M 2182 f.; 2186 f.)[27]

25 Cf. Wachinger, Gespräche [n. 1], pp. 146 f., p. 151.

26 See n. 14 above. In his reply, the narrator ignores the age-related comments, choosing instead to focus on how such ventures might in fact go well, and on how both he and Brunhilt are sexually experienced: *Ich sprach: »zart frow, das möcht wol sin, / Hett ich gůt wetter, wind und segel. / Mich dunckt, ir wissent ǒch die regel, / Wå man den hünren salcz hin leit.*« (M 376–379). For a similar sexual metaphor involving *hünren*, see M 992–995: *Als bald er aberward durchbert / und west, wå man den hünren graiff, / Da namm es als ain wider swaiff / Mitt falschen tüken hie und dort.*

27 Note also the sardonic use of the term by the narrator's wife on his return, as she speculates on the reasons for his long absence: »*Ich main, du regst din alte tück: / Du habst ain wil gejubiliert.*« (M 6010 f.).

In her attacks on the narrator, the heathen Brunhilt also taps into prejudices concerning the moral turpitude of beghards and beguines:[28]

Ich main, du megst ain beghart sin.
Sie künden vil der sprüchelin,
Damit die welt ferirret wirt. (M 363–365)

This view of begharts and beguines is later accorded a certain endorsement within the narrative, when the narrator encounters an actual beguine who has devoted herself to heathen idols:

Zů mir tratt her ain alt begin,
Die truog ain büchlin in der hand,
Sie sprach: »gůt man, du syest gemant
An Terviant, den werden got!« (M 716–719)

There is some ambiguity here as to whether she represents a single extreme case of spiritual deviancy – a supposedly religious woman who has settled in a faraway country and embraced every aspect of the local culture – or whether the implication is that all beguines are, by their very natures, fundamentally heathen. This latter approach, which tallies with Early Modern practices of labelling all religious opponents as metaphorical Turks,[29] further undermines the idea that the land of Venus-Minne is genuinely separate from the narrator's home country.

The most striking illustration of Brunhilt's Western mindset is triggered by the narrator's reference to the Christian duty to treat prisoners with kindness:

Ir wissent wol, sant Alßbeth schribt, / Das man gefangen trösten sol. (M 398 f.). Here, the narrator appears to draw on the full spectrum of meanings for the term *trösten*, a ploy which is not lost on Brunhilt:

Sie sprach: »das waiß ich selber wol,
Du ungetrüwer göcken snabel.
Ich bins nit die suß Arabel,
Die dort dem markis wol geviel,
Da er sie fůrt in ainen kiell
Her über merr von Todiern.« (M 400–405)

By warning the narrator that she is not prepared to treat him in the way that Arabel treated Willeham (any more than she is prepared to play Shulamit to Solomon),

28 Cf. Richard Kieckhefer, Repression of Heresy in Medieval Germany, Liverpool 1979, pp. 19–51. See also: Labels and Libels: Naming Beguines in Northern Medieval Europe, ed. by Letha Böhringer [et al.], Turnhout 2014 (Sanctimoniales 1).

29 Cf. Christopher Highley, Catholics writing the Nation in Early Modern Britain and Ireland, Oxford 2008, pp. 54–56, who notes that both Catholics and Protestants presented their religious opponents as metaphorical Turks.

Brunhilt demonstrates her familiarity with the German literary canon.[30] When he, unabashed, replies that he is glad that she knows the story, she retorts that if she only got the chance, she would kick him into the fire – not unlike Rennewart in ›Willehalm‹, who tosses the cook into the fire under a cauldron of boiling water.[31] The sense of a shared literary framework is underscored by the last line of the passage just quoted, in which the phrase *her über merr* suggests a specifically Western perspective on the elopement: Willehalm brought his beloved *here* from the Orient. This again begs the question of how seriously we are really to take oriental status of Brunhilt.

A passing Saracen knight then intervenes, telling Brunhilt to leave the narrator alone, on the grounds that *Es zymmpt nit rainen frovwen wol, / Das sie gefangen redent haiß*. (M 416 f.). On one level, he is simply picking up on Brunhilt's hostile image of kicking the narrator into the hot fire; however, as Wachinger points out, M 417 should be translated as »dass sie Gefangene durch Reden hitzig machen«.[32] In other words, this knight is essentially suggesting the same interactive mode (based on stimulation and arousal) as was proposed by the narrator – and vehemently rejected by Brunhilt herself.[33] Whether this indicates any familiarity with the story of Arabel and Willehalm on the part of the Saracen knight is a moot point; he may simply have noticed the narrator's flirtatious attitude to Brunhilt. But other Saracens are certainly well-versed in German literature – for example, the *knecht* who later brings a mule for the narrator to ride makes passing reference to Gawein, Parzival and Artus (M 4794–4817).

Despite the superficial similarities in narrative structure, ›Die Mörin‹ and ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹ differ significantly in their handling of the narrator's guilt and punishment. In ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹, the narrator is clearly at fault. Even within the course of the narrative, we see him boasting foolishly of his own faithfulness, whilst falling at the first hurdle. Furthermore, the personifications within this text are largely unproblematic and possess the appropriate moral authority to judge him. It is not unreasonable for fraw Abentur to chide him for having so easily forgotten the pure woman whom she had previously given him: *du hast mir doch gesworn, / du welst sie numer glan* (SA 1548 f.), and for having misbehaved from the very outset of his career as a knight (SA 1924–1933).

Nonetheless, there is something disturbing about the vehemence with which all the personifications in ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹ respond to the narrator's transgres-

30 Similarly, in M 3493–3497, Eckhart points out to Brunhilt that her treatment of the narrator is unlike that of Lunete towards Iwein. Whilst it is unsurprising that the German Eckhart should know this story, the implication is that Brunhilt would also understand the reference.

31 Wolfram von Eschenbach, Willehalm. Nach der Handschrift 857 der Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen, ed. by Joachim Heinzle, Tübingen 1994 (Altdeutsche Textbibliothek 108), p. 286,2–30.

32 Wachinger, Anmerkungen [n. 1], p. 225.

33 According to Wachinger, Gespräche [n. 1], p. 146, the intervention of the Saracen knight constitutes »ein kleiner Mannestriumph« for the unhappy narrator.

sions. Even on the journey, fraw Druw fantasizes about violent punishment: *das ich dich nit soll straffen / mit eynem knüttel, das ist mir leyd* (SA 1143 f.), Fraw Abentur goes as far as to threaten a *Fehmegericht*:

man soll dich billich han
als ein verfurten man,
der in des riches ban
zu Westfaln ist verteilt. (SA 1550–1553)

When the narrator then tries to shift the blame on to her for having allowed him to stray (SA 1955: *die schuld ist uwer gancz*), she falls into a rage (SA 1913: *von czorn rot*) before telling him that he deserves to die by being hanged or drowned in a sack (SA 1980–1983).

However, despite this threatening language and apparent disregard for process, the situation is easily resolved. Ever focussed on gender difference, the narrator chooses to appeal to the feminine reputation of his captors:

ir frawen zart,
es ist nit uwer art,
besonders reynen wyben:
man wirt das wonder schriben
in ein karonick noch. (SA 2011–2015)

Whilst this argument may be considered potentially irritating in that it imposes limitations on the scope of these personification to punish transgressions against the values that they embody, it does in fact save him. Even fraw Ere endorses his point that it is inappropriate for women to exact the death penalty:

die red die ist nit gut.
kein fraw soll ůbbers blut
ir urteil nummer sprechen:
der babst und all sin dechan
die haben es verboten. (SA 2221–2225)

This deference to papal authority stands in marked contrast to the equivalent scenario in ›Die Mörin‹, in which the narrator's more frightening female opponents are heathen and therefore unconcerned with the decrees of masculine Christian authority figures. In ›Des Spiegel Abenteuer‹, however, the hero is untied, forgiven and sent home after a round of reprimands. As fraw Dugent puts it, this Empress (unlike Venus-Minne) is fundamentally sensible: *myn fraw hat strengen mut / und doch nit ungehur* (SA 1496 f.).

›Die Mörin‹ is a more overtly legalistic text than ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹. There is still some focus on the erotic fickleness of the narrator, echoing the charge formulated by fraw Abentur in the other work: the narrator has failed to remain faithful to his *schön amy* (M 1555), here gifted to him by Venus-Minne: *Er wölt sich lon beniegen*

nicht / *An ainr amy, wie schön die wer* (M 1562 f.). However, this is not the key issue: as one knight points out, you would need a lot of gallows if you were to hang every man who was unfaithful to a woman (M 580–586). Unfaithfulness is in any case normal practice in Germany, at least according to Eckhart: *Die welt ist manger untrẃ vol,* / *In tütschen landen sunderbar* (M 752 f.). Later, the narrator adds the point that women are just as unfaithful as men, in Swabia and everywhere else:

Man vint ŏch vil der frŏwen zart,
Die untrẃ haben nit für schand,
Zuo Swăben und in mangem land. (M 2342–2344)

Here, Venus-Minne herself seems to be a case in point. The narrator characterises her as *vast unrein* (M 739) and also speculates about her relationship with a particular young knight at court (M 274–277). Above all, he wonders why she seems to be obsessed with the question of other people's fidelity when she herself has enjoyed more than one *osterspil* (M 2340). This last comment goes to the heart of the inconsistency in the construction of Venus-Minne, who is simultaneously presented as an outraged moralist and as an unbridled hedonist. Later on, as part of the presentation of ›her‹ four German episcopal cities, she specifically endorses the licentious practices in these places:

Sollens haben nit für schand,
Ob ains dem andern fruntschafft tůt.
Ain haymlich küssen das ist gůt
Mit brüstlin griffen on geverd.
Nie bessers ward uff diser erd.
Das hon ich in erloubet all. (M 5700–5705)

and regrets that Ulm and Augsburg are not quite so easy-going – although she still retains some influence there (M 5708–5713). Stephen Wailes has argued that Venus-Minne is essentially a personification of *luxuria*. However, whilst this approach provides a context for her impetuous and self-indulgent nature, it does not take account of the more judgmental aspects of her personality. It is difficult to understand why a figure embodying the principle of sexual gratification would object so strongly to the narrator's fickleness in former love-relationships.[34]

However, the focus in these passages on what is or is not normal practice in Germany underscores the fact that the issue at stake is ultimately not one of morality, but rather of jurisdiction. The narrator and his supporters base their defence on the fact that he is not one of her subjects (M 2383: *Ich sicz doch nit in irem land*) but rather a free Swabian (e. g. M 1771, 1850–1854), who, at the very least, has the right to be tried in his home country (M 3530–3541). His opponents, however, main-

34 Stephen L. Wailes, The character of Love in Hermann von Sachsenheim's *Die Mörin*, Colloquia Germanica 9 (1975), pp. 205–222.

tain that he subjected himself to Venus-Minne, to some extent because he has relied on her support in his erotic enterprises (M 2127–2131), but more specifically because he has sworn a secret oath to her (M 659, 1002, 1539) and to her child Cupid (M 1546). Whilst the narrator admits to having been inconstant in love, he denies having sworn the oath. The legal process is further compromised in various ways: the judge, King Tannhäuser, is hardly impartial, since Queen Venus-Minne declares that he will rule in accordance with her wishes (*M* 1923–1929). She also tries to short-circuit the process by arguing that a Christian is not entitled to a fair hearing (M 1036–1039); whilst Brunhilt quotes Machmet as an authority for the principle that rulers should be able to do exactly what they want (M 2086–2090).

The question of jurisdiction becomes even more problematic as a final compromise is proposed: the narrator is allowed to return home, on condition that he swears an oath promising to present himself for trial in one of four German cities over which Venus-Minne claims to have control:

So merck! ich nenn die stett all fier.
Sie sind gestifft in rechter zier.
Die ain haist Köln und litt am Rin.
Die ander haisset Argentin,
Die mangem ritter ist bekent,
In tütscher zung manß Stråsburg nent.
Die dritt ouch Basel ist genant.
Die vierd du ist im Schwăbenland
Und haisset Kostencz, das ist wăr.
Sie hond geschworn vor mangem jăr,
Sie wellend sin min underton.
Darumb ich sie gefryet hon
Für ander stet in tütschem land. (M 5687–5699)

There follows an almost amicable – and innuendo-laden – conversation between the narrator and Venus-Minne as to which of the four episcopal cities might suit him best. She suggests Cologne as the most enjoyable place,[35] but the narrator demurs, saying that at his age, he would prefer the relative calm of Strasbourg.

The extraordinary notion of Venus-Minne controlling these four cities may partly be explained as an amplification of a motif from ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹. At the equivalent point in that text (i. e. when the narrator is about to be sent home), fraw Minne claims special rights over the city of Cologne:

ein stat heist Koln am Rin,
da bin ich meisterinn:
darumb heis ich fraw Mynn,
als mengem ist bekand. (SA 2492–5)

35 The narrator has previously singled out Cologne as a particularly sybaritic place, in contrast to nearby Aachen (M 2345–2355).

In ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹, this claim comes across as a mildly humorous comment on the libidinous behaviour of the inhabitants of Cologne. It is not particularly relevant for the story-line, and, given the bland and rather conventional presentation of the personification Minne in that text, there is nothing controversial about it. In ›Die Mörin‹, however, the effect is rather different. Readers familiar with ›Willehalm‹ will remember the chilling suggestion that Terramer's aim was not just to win his daughter back, but also to bring the heathen faith to Rome and Aachen.[36] Such a prospect would have been disturbing even in the thirteenth century, but in a fifteenth-century text that has already made allusion to the Turks at the Iron Gates, there is something deeply problematic about the idea that these key German cities are already under heathen control. Of course, the problem is an intellectual, rather than a real one: it is simply an extrapolation from the conceit of having a heathen personification of love. Furthermore, as in ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹, a potentially nightmarish situation is suddenly resolved very quickly and easily. Assisted by Eckhart, the narrator swears a nonsense oath and, because this is done in Latin, Venus-Minne does not understand that she has been fooled (M 5752–5761). It is unclear whether her ignorance of Latin is a function of her oriental provenance or of her gender – but the stratagem of the nonsense oath certainly contributes to the opposition (discussed earlier) between the sensible, co-operative interactions between the men and the strident, irrational stances adopted by key female figures.

The idea of Venus-Minne as a dangerous heathen imperialist is undercut by certain statements about her that suggest a Western perspective on her part. When dismissing the narrator with mock severity, she expresses the curiously formulated wish: *Ich wölt, er wer by Jesus grab / Und seß dort uff herr Josephs stain* (M 5902 f.). The sense of this seems to be that she wishes him to be a long way away – however, as Schlosser points out, from an oriental perspective, the Holy Land is presumably not as remote from the Orient as it would be from Germany.[37] As in the case of Brunhilt's account of Willehalm's journey, Venus-Minne seems to be considering the world from a Western, or even a German perspective. Similarly, just as Brunhilt is surprisingly well-informed about Christianity, Venus-Minne has previously talked about the history of Cologne and about its valuable relics (M 1856–1873). This occidentalizing of Venus-Minne is part of the fundamental paradox created in ›Die Mörin‹: the audience is confronted with the terror of imagining German cities under the sway of an oriental despot, yet at the same time they are reminded that on some level, this threatening figure is perhaps not really oriental, or indeed real at all.

The ›Zimmerische Chronik‹, completed in the middle of the sixteenth century, suggests that the court of Venus-Minne should be read as a cypher for the pleasure-oriented court of Mechthild von der Pfalz:

36 Wolfram von Eschenbach, Willehalm [n. 31], p. 450,21–25.
37 Schlosser [n. 1], p. 242.

Also ist sie hernach ir lebenlang zu Rotenburg bliben. Ir wesen und hofhalten ist aller frewden und wollusts, so man erdenken und gehaben mogt, uberflissig voll gewesen; hett auch fraw Venusperg [*künden*] *genennt werden, darin man sprücht sovil frewden sein, daher auch der alt ritter, herr Hermann von Sachsenhaim, ein schön gedicht von ihr gemacht, genannt die Mörin, wie sollichs von bemelten ritter in reimenweis geschriben und auch in druck ist außgegangen, ganz lustig zu lesen.*[38]

Whilst some critics have followed this prompt,[39] Wachinger rightly warns that any such »verschlüsselte Bezüge« in the text are not »ausreichend gesichert«.[40] Given the overwhelmingly negative portrayal of Venus-Minne (e. g. M 3082 f.: *Mang übel wib ist in der hell, / Das lauß wir ovch die küngin sin*), it seems implausible that Hermann von Sachsenheim would have wanted to suggest any direct correlation between the two female figures, notwithstanding the dedication of ›Die Mörin‹ to Mechthild and her brother (M 6042–6047).

A more promising connection is that between Mechthild, the patron of literature, and fraw Abentur herself – a figure who, in ›Die Mörin‹, ranks above Venus-Minne, and who is presented positively in both texts. Originally created by Wolfram as the personification of a particular narrative,[41] Vrou Aventiure normally interacts with poets/narrators, rather than with patrons. ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹, however, proposes a different configuration, whereby Mechthild is drawn into the interdiegetic world through the suggestion that she is a personal favourite of fraw Abentur. This is explained by the friendly dwarf who transports the narrator back home to Swabia. When the narrator explains the status of Mechthild:

38 Die Zimmerische Chronik, ed. by K. A. Barack, Stuttgart 1869 (BLVS 91–93), vol. 1, p. 455.

39 Theil [n. 4], p. 137: »Die repräsentative Verklärung des Rittertums steht in eigentümlicher Spannung zur parodistischen Seite des Werks. So entspricht der Hof der Frau Venus ganz dem Rottenburger Hof, Frau Venus selbst der Pfalzgräfin, so daß die Zimmersche Chronik zweifellos recht hat, wenn sie Mechthild mit ›Frau Venusperg‹ identifiziert.« Schlosser [n. 1], p. 10, regards it as possible that the »Liberalität« of Mechthild's court was such that an identification of Mechthild with Venus-Minne would not have caused offence. Dietrich Huschenbett, Hermann von Sachsenheim. Ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte des 15. Jahrhunderts, Berlin 1962 (Philologische Studien und Quellen 12) notes the reader »wird [...] zunächst an die Pfalzgräfin und spätere Erzherzogin selbst denken« (p. 48), but then highlights the unlikeliness of Hermann setting out to mock Mechthild and her court (p. 50). Strohschneider [n. 1], pp. 23 f. draws attention to the numerous political allusions in the text, adding »Daneben finden sich Passagen, die die Hinweise der Zimmerschen Chronik als durchaus glaubwürdig erscheinen lassen und für diese auch Anknüpfungspunkte gewesen sein könnten, etwa die Obszönitäten gegenüber Venus und Mörin, die kaum anders denn als Anspielungen auf recht konkrete Vorkommnisse in einer Hofgesellschaft gelesen werden können [...]« (p. 24).

40 Wachinger, Gespräche [n. 1], p. 141.

41 Cf. Maurer [n. 4], p. 162, note 243. One dwarf is mentioned in the will of Eberhard im Bart (Urach, 26 December 1492): https://www2.landesarchiv-bw.de/ofs21/bild_zoom/thumbnails.php?bestand=3703&basisid=150048&syssuche=&logik (08.09.2018).

ich sprach: »die fraw min,
uß Beyerlant geborn,
pfalczgrefin ußerkorn,
besonder Rynes strum.
in manchem herczogthum
ist herczog ir gemahel,
der manheit kern ein stahel,
von Osterrich genant.« (SA 2672–2679)

the dwarf replies that he is already familiar with this lady, given the affection that his mistress, fraw Abentur, feels for her:

myn fraw, die Abentur,
die ist der furstin holt:
sie git ir richen solt
besonder hoh synn.
sie hatt die waren mynn
vor allen dingen liep:
sie dutt nit als ein diep,
der get sin zitt verstilt.
ob sie der ern spilt,
das ist nit wider got.
sie heltet sin gebot
als dan ein furstin soll. (SA 2682–2693)

A further parallelism between Mechthild and fraw Abentur derives from the fact that they both have dwarves in their entourage – and, as far as Mechthild is concerned, this claim may have some basis in reality, given the (slightly later) historical evidence for dwarves being kept at the Württemberg courts.[42] In a further, slightly grotesque, twist, the narrator proposes a match between the fraw Abentur's male dwarf and a female dwarf at Mechthild's court. However, male dwarf rejects this proposal, claiming that the female dwarf has a bad reputation:

man sagt zu Stückgarten
von ir nit hubsche mer. (SA 2720 f.)

42 Another dwarf receives money from Margarethe von Savoyen in 1480 (https://www2.landesarchiv-bw.de/ofs21/bild_zoom/zoom.php?bestand=3703&id=155178&screenbreite=1920&screenhoehe=1044) (08.09.2018). See also Ellen Widder, Herzog Heinrich und seine Zwerge. Eine alpenländische Miniatur, in: Riesen und Zwerge, ed. by the Stiftung Bozner Schlößer, Bozen 2016 (Runkelsteiner Schriften zur Kulturgeschichte 10), pp. 189–198. Barbara Gonzaga, the daughter-in-law of Mechthild, also brought a dwarf with her to Germany: cf. Von Mantua nach Württemberg: Barbara Gonzaga und ihr Hof. Da Mantova al Württemberg: Barbara Gonzaga e la sua corte. Begleitbuch und Katalog zur Ausstellung des Landesarchivs Baden-Württemberg, Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, ed. by Peter Rückert, Stuttgart 2012, p. 12. I am grateful to Anja Thaller for these references.

More specifically, she is decried as a *bippernel* (M 2715) – a difficult term which may suggest flatulence.[43] This apparent slur on Mechthild's female dwarf possibly reflects rivalry between the two courts in Württemberg (with Mechthild, even at Rottenburg, being more closely aligned with Urach). The male dwarf's rejection of the proposal may also be to establish a contrast between the foolish narrator, who falls in love with a magic image, and the wise dwarf, who, although able to travel between different worlds, realises that it is best to limit his erotic endeavours to his own world.

Whilst the two powerful female figures thus remain separate, the one being earthly and the other allegorical, both are associated with the creation and promotion of literature. This applies equally well to ›Die Mörin‹, even if this text does not draw Mechthild into the interdiegetic world in quite the same way as does ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹. To some extent, of course, Hermann deviates from the Wolfram tradition of associating Vrou Aventiure closely with particular narrative material: in both ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹ and ›Die Mörin‹, she is presented more as a cosmic force holding together the universe. However, the universe in question, especially in ›Die Mörin‹, is a highly artificial one, woven together out of intertextual allusion, hermeneutic twists and pure whimsy (M 3: *torheit*). The topographical incongruities dissolve in the light of the narrator's principle that *All sach durch Aubentüre geschicht* (M 3860) – and, if fraw Abentur represents the driving force behind such intellectual exuberance, Mechthild represents the ideal recipient who allows the constructed world(s) to flourish within her own locality.

Overall, both ›Die Mörin‹ and ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹ are characterised by a playful inversion of East and West, of the global and the local. Within ›Die Mörin‹, much of the wit is enabled by the blurring of different hermeneutic layers, with the result that Venus-Minne is both an allegorical and a political force, capable of reaching as far as Germany. The notion that this heathen despot has four German episcopal cities in her sway constitutes a particularly pointed expression of this hermeneutic paradox. Nonetheless, religious differences and gender conflicts are negotiated with a light touch, and potentially threatening situations defused with an ease that borders on the absurd. In both texts, the self-stylization of the narrator as a Swabian provides a lynchpin for the humour: he comes across as naive and lecherous, but also fundamentally honourable. Alongside the extensive discussion of Swabian identity are also some more specific references to Württemberg in ›Die Mörin‹, particularly in the context of slightly grotesque peasant magic. Finally, whilst the extensive web of intertextual references (particularly to Wolfram) places both works in the broader German literary tradition, the foregrounding of Mechthild von der Pfalz endows the region with a particular cultural significance. This is expressed most prominently in ›Des Spiegels Abenteuer‹, in which Mechthild von der Pfalz is presented as an authority operating in parallel with the allegorical fraw Abentur.

43 Huschenbett, Namen [n. 1], p. 54.